THE USE OF ADVISORY COUNCILS IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN AGRICULTURE

BY

MARSHALL JEWELL SCOTT

B.S., University of Illinois, 1932
M.A., Washington University, 1938

AN ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
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Advisory groups have been used extensively in connection with many institutions and organizations in democratic societies. Public educational agencies, however, have been slow to accept and use advisory groups even though they have been recommended highly by authorities in education. In view of this discrepancy a study was designed to investigate the use made of advisory groups in vocational education in agriculture along the lines suggested in the following paragraphs.

The Problem

The study was made in an effort to determine the following information regarding the use made of advisory groups in vocational education in agriculture: (1) The extent of use made of advisory groups or councils, (2) The purposes of such councils, (3) The methods of organization, (4) The conduct of meetings, (5) The practices which appear likely to lead to success, (6) The practices which appear likely to result in failures, (7) The attitude of vocational agriculture teachers toward the use of advisory groups, and (8) The outcomes or results credited to advisory group activities.

The term *advisory groups* as used in the study includes *advisory councils* which deal with the entire program of agricultural education and *advisory committees* which deal with specific phases of the agricultural education program.

Procedures

A number of procedures were used including the following: (1) A review of the literature pertaining to advisory groups with special emphasis on literature concerning advisory groups in agricultural education, (2) A detailed account of the Fisher Advisory Council experiences, (3) A study of the attitudes of those concerned with the Fisher Advisory Council, (4) A

letter of inquiry to all state supervisors of agricultural education, (5) A survey of all Illinois departments of vocational agriculture relative to the use made of advisory groups, (6) A questionnaire to all Illinois teachers responding in the survey, and all teachers recommended by state supervisors of agricultural education, (7) A more comprehensive questionnaire for teachers responding to the previous questionnaire.

Data gathered through all the procedures listed above were reported in the study and along with personal experience of the writer served as a basis for conclusions formulated in the thesis.

Review of the Literature

The literature indicates that advisory groups have been used since the organization of society. As society became more complicated it has been increasingly more difficult to maintain interest in advisory group activity, but more necessary to have them if democratic practices are to be followed.

While advisory groups have been used more or less in agricultural education since before the passage of the Smith-Hughes Act in 1917 providing for vocational education in agriculture, the public schools have been slow to accept them because of the autocratic arrangements in most public school programs. Writers seem in agreement concerning the advisability of using advisory groups in connection with public school education, but teachers and administrators have been slow to put them into practcal use.

Vocational teachers seem to have made more use of the advisory group technique than other groups in education. The literature examined indicates that of vocational teachers the vocational agriculture teachers have made the most use of advisory groups, particularly in the area of adult education.

The Fisher Advisory Council

An analysis of the first seven years of advisory council

work at Fisher revealed that the advisory council technique was successful and that those who had worked with the Council were enthusiastic about its accomplishments and its possibilities.

The Fisher Advisory Council was started in 1941 as an experimental organization consisting of nine men at the outset but later was increased to twelve members in addition to two representatives of the Board of Education. New members were nominated by the agriculture teacher, with some help from the administrator and later from the Advisory Council, and elected by the Board of Education. Members were selected with the intention of having various areas, ages, and interest groups, represented on the Advisory Council.

The Council members started by making a study of the agricultural community in which they lived. Agricultural and educational objectives were established for the Department of Vocational Agriculture. Surveys and evaluations were made from time to time after which objectives were re-examined and revised if necessary.

Many improvements in the Fisher Community can be traced directly or indirectly to the efforts and activities of the Advisory Council. No effort was made to distinguish between these accomplishments and those which might be made in a community with an active department of vocational agriculture but without an advisory council. No effort was made to distinguish or separate the effect of the agricultural education program from other educational agencies or other factors which might have been responsible for the community changes.

Data secured from the United States Census, surveys, and estimates of the Council indicate many changes. Some of these changes are as follows: More cooperative spirit in the community, increase in standards of living, increase in efficiency of production of corn, pork, beef, dairy, and poultry, more functional agricultural education, increased respect for public education, and the establishment of many worthwhile

community activities tending to perpetuate the progress already noted.

The Advisory Council met about once each month with an average of 75 per cent attendance at the meetings. Thirty-six different members served on the Council during the seven years included in the study, representing about 10 per cent of the number of farmers in the community. Each year one-third of the Council members were replaced with new members who were appointed for a three-year period.

Serving on the Advisory Council appeared to be a very effective method of adult education for council members as well as administrators, members of the board of education, and the agriculture teacher. The attitude of those individuals working with the advisory council was enthusiastically complimentary in most cases. Approximately 50 per cent of the adults in the community knew about the work of the Advisory Council, and felt that it had benefited the Department of Vocational Agriculture and the entire community.

Study of Other Advisory Groups

Twenty-one state supervisors of agricultural education responded to a letter of inquiry concerning the use of advisory groups in their respective states. Most supervisors were interested in advisory councils and reported some activity in the use of councils, particularly in veterans' training programs. General advisory councils seemed to be favored over advisory committees, in most states.

An extensive survey in Illinois, taken in 1946, showed that of 221 replies (approximately one-half of the Illinois teachers) 152 teachers of vocational agriculture were using one or more advisory groups in connection with their departments of vocational agriculture. The majority of Illinois teachers cooperating in the study felt that the use of advisory groups increased the amount of cooperation secured from others, increased the teacher's knowledge of his community, provided an opportunity to delegate more work to others,

made the teacher's work more interesting, broadened the vision of the teacher, and increased student enrollments. Approximately one-half of the administrators and boards of education were reported to be actively interested in advisory group activities. Less than five per cent of the teachers reported harmful effects of advisory groups such as jealousies and suspicions directed toward the department of vocational agriculture or the teacher.

General Advisory Councils

Detailed questionnaires were completed and returned by 24 teachers of vocational agriculture who have used general advisory councils for an average of four years. Considerable variation was noted among advisory councils. Councils in Illinois were made up of an average of ten members compared with eight in other states. Most Illinois council members were appointed for three years, while councils included in the study from other states varied from one year to an indefinite period in terms of members.

The majority of new council members were nominated by the agriculture teachers, who were usually assisted by administrators and councils, and elected by boards of education. Established community leaders were selected as council members in most other states and in approximately one-half of the general councils in Illinois.

Inactive members did not seem to be a problem for most teachers cooperating in the study. When such a problem did exist the inactives were replaced as soon as it was convenient to do so.

There was a wide variation in the number of meetings held each year, but the average number of meetings was about four. Many of the most enthusiastic teachers reported that meetings were held approximately once each month. Average attendance of council members was about 76 per cent. About one-half of the teachers reported that they had regular times for council meetings and prompt starting and closing times.

Minutes of meetings were kept by approximately one-half of the councils studied. Annual programs of work were seldom prepared, but agendas for individual meetings were prepared in most cases by the teachers or jointly by the teachers and the council chairman. Administrators and boards of education took an active interest in about two-thirds of the councils studied.

Teachers reported that the effectiveness of advisory councils may be limited by a number of factors such as: "Failure to understand the purposes of an advisory council", "Lack of leadership", "Competition from other activities", "Lack of planning", "Failure to give council members responsibility", and "Poor attendance".

Advantages of advisory councils were fairly well agreed upon by the cooperating teachers of vocational agriculture. They felt that the use of councils increased teachers' prestige in their respective communities. Successful experience with councils increased the self-confidence of teachers. Councils helped teachers to discover the educational needs of the people in their communities. Other advantages were that advisory councils increased the teachers' knowledge of their communities, increased lay support, resulted in larger student enrollments, and helped develop fresh ideas and new methods for solving existing problems.

Teachers cooperating in the study were not in general agreement regarding disadvantages of advisory councils. Some of the disadvantages mentioned were: "Takes more time and energy", "Possible professional jealousy", "Possible misunderstandings", "Attempted to dictate to teacher", and "The department of agriculture may be expanded too fast".

The questionnaires revealed that most teachers felt that councils have been successful in reaching the objectives for which they were established. Three-fourths of the teachers stated that they would not like to teach vocational agriculture without the use of an advisory council.

Advisory Committees

Results in the study of advisory committees were similar to those in the study of advisory councils. Since all types of committees including Adult-Farmer, Veteran, Veteran Education, Young-Farmer, and F.F.A., were grouped together, significant differences tended to disappear. The small number of some types of advisory committees on which detailed questionnaires were completed made it impractical to study each type separately.

Conclusions

Based on personal experience, informal discussions with other teachers of agriculture, and data compiled by the use of the questionnaires described in this study, the writer has come to the following general conclusions.

1. Leaders in agricultural education favor the use of advisory councils in connection with departments of vocational agriculture.
2. Most teachers who have used advisory councils report varying degrees of success with them.
3. Risks in using or developing advisory councils are present, but casualties developing in connection with or a result of using a council, may have developed anyway but probably not as rapidly.
4. Criticisms of advisory councils are most likely to come either from those who have had little or no experience with councils or from teachers who have attempted to use advisory groups without following democratic procedures.
5. Administrators have at times been afraid of advisory groups, particularly those administrators who have tended to be dictatorial in their personalities and in the operation of their schools. Jealousies of administrators toward agriculture teachers have marred working re-

lationships in some cases. Fear, or lack of self-confidence on the part of the administrators has been responsible for most of the jealousies.

6. Boards of education have tended to be somewhat passive in their attitudes toward advisory councils unless they have had a particularly satisfying experience with advisory councils. Most boards of education reflect the attitudes of their administrators toward advisory groups, particularly in those schools where administrators have had long tenures.

7. Advisory groups are usually more effective when they are organized in a community where the board of education, the administrator, and the teacher of vocational agriculture, all clearly understand the purposes for which an advisory group is established and all work toward more effective use of the advisory council or committee.

8. It is more difficult to reactivate a dead advisory group than to organize a new one. A previous unfortunate incident in connection with the use of an advisory group makes it difficult to establish a new one until some time has elapsed or until some new leaders have appeared on the scene.

9. While most advisory groups have been beneficial, few have been as successful as they might have been if better trained leaders had been available and more effective procedures had been used.

10. College of education specialists and state agricultural education supervisors have done a great deal to increase the number of successful advisory groups in use, but much more needs to be done in the future by these educational leaders. Helping advisory groups has usually been just another burden for educational leaders without an increase in man-power for the additional work required. There has been a tendency on

the part of many educational leaders to think that the effective use of advisory groups either is or is not present and little can be done about it. Increased emphasis has been placed on working with advisory groups in the teacher-training program in agricultural education at the University of Illinois. There is need for continued and possibly increased emphasis on the use of advisory groups in future teacher-training programs in agricultural education.

11. Advisory groups should spend part of their time determining how to reduce the load placed upon individual teachers of agriculture rather than so much of their time in planning how to increase their load. Advisory groups may be successfully used in increasing the staff or otherwise reducing teacher loads, but they seldom are.

12. Advisory council or committee members should be selected in such a way that members represent as many of the interests in a community as possible. Natural leaders should be selected rather than typical office-holders. Members should be rotated so that more interests may be represented and a greater number of individuals will have the benefit of council experience.

13. Advisory groups made up of members selected by various community organizations do not serve the same purpose as a cross-sectional, representative, organization. There may be a place for an organization made up of members elected or appointed by the various organizations in a community, but such an arrangement does not appear to be satisfactory for advisory councils for public education due to their tendency to maintain the status quo rather than work for progressive improvement made possible through effective education.

14. Training and experience gained by participating in council activities tend to develop new community leaders if natural ability has been considered in the selection of

advisory group members.

15. Meetings should be held regularly and not less than twelve times per year in order to maintain interest and increase the effectiveness of advisory councils. Meetings should start and end promptly according to a plan agreed upon in advance by the council members. Meetings should be conducted as informally as possible with occasional opportunities to share in refreshments. Minutes should be kept of all meetings and recorded in a permanent volume which is left in the department of vocational agriculture and available to any individual in the community. Some training should probably be given in the skills needed in writing an interesting and worthwhile report of each advisory group meeting. A copy of the minutes should be presented to the administrator with the suggestion that he make it available to the board of education.

16. Publicity should be given to advisory council membership. Activities of the department will be better accepted by the public if it is understood that such activities have been approved by the advisory council. Items which are brought up in council meetings which are not properly a concern of the agriculture advisory council should not be included in the minutes unless it is mentioned in the record that it was recognized that such problems were inconsistent with the purposes of the council. Caution should be used to prevent publicity from appearing which will later embarrass the advisory council members or school officials.

17. Agenda for advisory council meetings should be prepared in advance by the chairman and the agriculture teacher, subject to change by the council as discussion progresses. Some questions should be held over from each meeting to the next in order to aid in sustaining interest and also to encourage more mature thinking on the part of council members.

18. Advisory councils should study problems in their respective communities concerning farming and farm life. Objectives should be stated clearly and in such a way that they will serve as a guide for agriculture teachers, administrators, and boards of education, in providing an agricultural education program which will help individuals move toward these objectives.

19. Advisory councils should help evaluate annually the program of agricultural education in their communities. They should, however, request professional help in this important task.

20. A properly conceived and organized advisory council will be an excellent method of developing an educational program leading to a more democratic way of life. It will tend to encourage more democratic school administration, and will discover and train lay leaders who will aid in establishing and maintaining a more democratic way of life in a community.

21. An effective advisory council will improve a good teacher of vocational agriculture, and make his work more challenging and satisfying.

22. An effective advisory council will increase the length of an agriculture teacher's tenure. If it becomes necessary to employ a new teacher of agriculture it will help the new teacher adjust to the community and become established more quickly.

23. Personal qualities which tend to lead toward failure as an agriculture teacher also tend to encourage council failures or casualties. Capable teachers are likely to work successfully with an advisory council. Teacher weaknesses, however, may be spotlighted and brought out into the open more quickly with an active advisory council.

24. Inactive council members tend to eliminate themselves from advisory councils. It is important that a pro-

cedure be established for replacing them as soon as possible after they become inactive. A council-made rule regarding replacement of inactive members seems to work well where it has been used.

25. Advisory councils need to evaluate their own program periodically, both to make necessary improvements and also to gain the greatest possible satisfaction from their efforts.

26. A successful advisory council provides one of the best possible methods for improving public relations. An advisory council which is established primarily for improving public relations, however, is likely to fail eventually, due to loss of interest on the part of council members when they learn that they are being "used" rather than depended upon for mature judgment in solving educational problems.

27. General advisory councils should concern themselves with the over-all program of vocational education in agriculture. Special advisory committees should be appointed to work on special phases of the agricultural program. Some members of the general advisory council should be on each special advisory committee but other individuals should also be appointed whenever such a procedure will improve the effectiveness of the advisory committee.

Implications for General School Councils

While this study did not attempt to deal with general school advisory councils, there are a number of conclusions relative to agriculture advisory councils which might apply to these councils.

There has been an increasing interest in general school advisory councils in Illinois during the past several years. Part of this interest is due to the reorganization of rural school districts in Illinois and the many problems confronting newly

formed unit districts.

Many administrators and boards of education probably lack the training or experience needed to work successfully with advisory councils. It seems safe to predict that a relatively large number of general school advisory councils will be ineffective or will fail entirely.

The same general basic principles listed in the over-all conclusions in this study regarding agricultural advisory councils should be helpful in developing successful general school advisory councils. The philosophy and practice of many administrators in the past probably has made working democratically with an advisory council more difficult than it would have been if educational practices had been more democratic.

There seems to be no reason why a general school advisory council could not be highly effective if it is organized for specific purposes and operated in a democratic manner. The agricultural advisory council would work more effectively in schools using general school advisory councils if several of its members were also to serve on the general school advisory council.

A careful study of experiences with general school advisory councils is needed before an attempt should be made to formulate conclusions regarding their value and before procedures can be recommended.

VITA

Marshall Jewell Scott was born July 15, 1910, on a farm near Yorkville, Kendall County, Illinois. He attended a one-room rural school and the Yorkville Community High School. Following graduation from high school in 1928, he enrolled in the University of Illinois from which he received the Bachelor of Science degree in June 1932.

In 1932 he became the teacher of vocational agriculture at Equality, Illinois, where he remained for two years. In 1934 he was employed to teach vocational agriculture at Freeburg, Illinois. While teaching at Freeburg he attended classes at Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri, and in 1938 was awarded the Master of Arts degree in Education with a Minor in Economics.

In 1940 he was elected to the position of vocational agriculture teacher at Fisher, Illinois, where he has been located while pursuing advanced graduate work, and making the study reported in this thesis. During the past nine years he has served as a cooperating teacher-trainer on the staff of the College of Education, University of Illinois.

He is a member of Phi Delta Kappa, Kappa Delta Pi, and Gamma Sigma Delta.